THE BISHOP OF BRISTOL'S

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 1783,

BEING

The Day appointed to be obſerved as the Day of the MARTYRDOM of KING CHARLES I.

Die Lunæ, 3° Februarij, 1783.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in Parliament aſſembled, That the Thanks of this Houſe be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Biſhop of Briſtol, for the Sermon by him preached before this Houſe, on Thurſday laſt, in the Abbey Church, Weſtminſter; and he is hereby deſired to cauſe the ſame to be forthwith printed and publiſhed.

ASHLEY COWPER,
Cler. Parliamentor.

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SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

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LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN THE

ABBEY CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,

ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 1783,

BEING

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BY LEWIS, LORD BISHOP OF BRISTOL.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

M.DCC.LXXXIII.

SERMON, &c.

PSALM LXXVI. 10.

SURELY THE WRATH OF MAN SHALL PRAISE THEE: THE REMAINDER OF WRATH SHALT THOU RESTRAIN.

THE whole Hiſtory of Mankind bears ample teſtimony, if we want teſtimony beyond that of our own experience, to the violence of human Paſſions and Reſentments. Every man is conſcious of his own freedom, I might even ſay, of his propenſity to follow the impulſe of thoſe Paſſions and Reſentments to the utmoſt. But if he do follow them, the effect they may produce in the world is not at his own diſpoſal; if it were, the very exiſtence of all Society muſt long ago have been at an end; or rather,

it could never have obtained at all.—The Bleſſings of Society, therefore, whatever they are, (and in a greater or leſs degree ſome ſuch bleſſings are felt and enjoyed by every man living) are to be referred not to any human origine; but to the goodneſs, the wiſdom and power of Him who made us ſuch as we are, and placed us in the various relations we hold of mutual connection and dependence on each other. In the natural world, where an orderly and regular ſucceſſion of effects is continually ſubject to our obſervation, towards the production of which our own abilities can have contributed nothing, it were folly in the extreme not to attribute all to a ſuperior Power in ſome ſenſe or other.—Though even here that very order and regularity which obtain, have led ſome men to exclude the Agency of God from his own Works.

To conſider God as the Creator only of the Univerſe, is a notion, in a religious ſenſe, little better than Atheiſm. For what matters it from whence the Univerſe ſprang, if it be regarded as ever afterwards utterly independent on that Cauſe which originally produced it.—It is only with total ignorance, or a very partial and circumſcribed knowledge of things indeed, that ſuch a notion can conſiſt.—The extended and judicious, and accurate enquiries of modern time have, in this reſpect, it muſt be owned, made valuable additions to the ſtock of Human knowledge.—The fair honeſt concluſion ariſing from the reſult of thoſe enquiries is ſimply this; that there do not reſide in mere Matter, either imparted or by neceſſity, any ſuch properties

as can of themſelves produce thoſe effects which are conſtantly manifeſt in the Material World; conſequently, that the ordinary Courſe of Nature, familiar as it is to us, is no other than a continued energy of divine Intelligence and divine Power.—Thus, "THE INVISIBLE THINGS OF "GOD FROM THE CREATION OF THE WORLD ARE "CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD BY THE THINGS "THAT ARE MADE; EVEN HIS ETERNAL POWER AND "GODHEAD[a]:" And thus do the voice of Reaſon and Revelation agree in proclaiming that the Hand of his Power is over all his Works; that "ALL THINGS WERE "CREATED BY HIM AND FOR HIM: AND THAT BY "HIM TOO ALL THINGS CONSIST[b]."

In the Moral World the Powers of Reaſonable Agents have a place; are exerted from different motives and to different ends. The ſucceſſion and order of events, and their dependence on each other, cannot here, on a partial view, (and the generality of men ſeldom look farther) be diſcovered with any certainty. Hence it hath happened, that too much hath been aſcribed to the Wiſdom and Projects of Men; and too much a great deal to blind Chance; that is, in fact, to no cauſe at all.—But, on a more enlarged view, it appears, that notwithſtanding the violence and wickedneſs of Human deſigns, we are not left to the Mercy of each other. The Reaſon of Man is free to expatiate within its own limits; the Choice of his Actions

[a] Rom. i. 20. [b] Col. i. 17.

is in himſelf, but the iſſue of that Choice is under the direction of Him who alone can bring Good out of Evil, and Order from the principles of Confuſion. Hence it is that from the buſtle of human paſſions and prejudices, a conſiſtence of Society ariſes on the whole beautiful and beneficial; and men enjoy, under various forms of Civil Government, the comforts of life and mutual intercourſe with ſecurity and freedom.——This enjoyment, nevertheleſs, admits of interruption. There are Storms in the Moral as well as in the Natural World. In both, no doubt, they have their uſe: for in both their effects are directed and limited by infinite goodneſs and wiſdom. It is one and the ſame beneficent hand "THAT STILLETH "THE NOISE OF THE SEAS, AND THE NOISE OF THEIR "WAVES, AND THE TUMULT OF THE PEOPLE [c]."—The wicked man, free to follow his own malicious purpoſes, and in the actual execution of them, is no other than "A SWORD [d]" of God dealing his warnings and judgments through the earth. Thus it is that "THE WRATH "OF MAN, WHICH WORKETH NOT THE RIGHTEOUS-"NESS OF GOD," yet "TURNETH TO HIS PRAISE [e]."

Such Reflections on the perpetual and univerſal operation of Divine Providence, comprehending that great and ſignal inſtance of it the Redemption of Mankind by the Death of Chriſt, furniſh perhaps the only Principle on which, circumſtanced as the World is, any ef-

[c] Pſalm lxv. 7. [d] Pſalm xvii. 13. [e] James i. 20. Pſalm lxxvi. 10.

fectual

fectual Religion can be maintained among Men. To be religious, it is neceſſary to know and believe not only that God is, but that he careth for us. Such Reflections are therefore frequently inculcated in every part of Scripture. The truth of them is inforced, and, as it were, exhibited to our immediate view in God's ſpecial government of the Jewiſh People. That we may not, however, ſtop our concluſion there, but ſee and allow that his care and love is extended to every creature—from the continued events of the world conſidered in connection, we have indiſputable Proof that the Word of Hiſtory is but a tranſcript of the preceding Word of Prophecy; conſequently that the whole arrangement of human affairs, in all their moſt intricate variety of complication, is conducted by that intelligent Mind, which is declared "BY THE "MOUTH OF THE PROPHETS SINCE THE WORLD "BEGAN[f]."—This Doctrine clearly eſtabliſhed and maintained, the ſeveral occurrences in the life of every individual become matter of religious contemplation; and furniſh the moſt important, and moſt affecting Leſſons of Humility, and Piety, and Reſignation.——Religion concerns us not only in our private and perſonal capacity, but in every relation that we hold.—Hence public Bleſſings and public Calamities require public and religious acknowledgement.—All countries, and all ages, have concurred in the practice. Our own Country, ſignalized by a variety of the moſt extraordinary diſpenſations of Providence,

[f] Luke i. 70.

ſupplies

ſupplies frequent occaſions for it. And it is no very favourable ſymptom, either in the religious or civil character of the preſent time, that theſe occaſions are obſerved with leſs ſerioufneſs and devotion than they uſed to be.—It is true with reſpect to other People, as well as the Iſraelites, that paſt occurrences "HAPPENED FOR ENSAMPLES, AND "ARE WRITTEN FOR THE ADMONITION OF SUCCEEDING "GENERATIONS [g]."

The whole Volume of Hiſtory doth not exhibit an event (one only excepted) which, conſidered in all its circumſtances, admits of more ſerious and uſeful reflection than that which we this day commemorate. Our attention to this object is now called for, not ſimply by the regular return of a ſtated day, (though that of itſelf, to well-diſpoſed and modeſt minds, is no trifling matter) but alſo by very ſtriking circumſtances in the preſent ſituation of our Country; by the pointed ſuggeſtion too of him to whoſe charge the chief management of our public intereſts, under God, is delegated; whom we heard but now, in the ſpirit and piety of his great anceſtor, in the genuine ſpirit of Chriſtian Charity, and with a dignity becoming his high ſtation, imploring the Almighty, that the very perſons who have violently thrown off their allegiance to his mild and temperate government, "*may be free from thoſe calamities* "*which, in the laſt age, proved in the Mother Country how* "*eſſential Monarchy is to the enjoyment of conſtitutional*

[g] 1 Cor. x. 11.

"*Liberty.*

" *Liberty* [h]."——What and how great thoſe calamities were, few can be wholly ignorant: the full extent of them cannot be better underſtood than from the terms in which the noble Hiſtorian of the time hath deſcribed that year when they reached their higheſt point. " *A year of reproach* " *and infamy above all years which had paſſed before it; a year* " *of the higheſt Diſſimulation and Hypocriſy, of the deepeſt Vil-* " *lainy and moſt bloody Treaſons that any nation was ever* " *curſed with or under* [i]."

Things were not brought to this diſmal ſtate at once, or in an inſtant; it was the gradual work of ſeveral years. —Pretences of a religious colour firſt began the miſchief. Surely the true nature of Chriſtianity could be little underſtood, or little attended to by thoſe who applied it to ſuch a purpoſe.—The precepts of the Goſpel are eminently calculated to promote peace and good order among men: as ſuch, if they are obſerved as they ought to be, they will infallibly make a man a good citizen, a Patriot in the beſt ſenſe of the word; but they can never make him a Rebel. If his zeal hurry him that way, depend upon it, it is of another growth; it is not according to Chriſtian knowledge, and ſeeks ſomething elſe in preference both to God's Glory and the good of Mankind.—The forming and modelling of States Chriſtianity meddles not with, nor ever did. The great Author of it left that matter at large

[h] King's Speech, Dec. 5, 1782.

[i] Clarendon. Hiſt. Book XI. at the end.

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[i] Clarendon. Hiſt. Book XI. at the end.

and

and untouched; only giving in his own perſon an example of due ſubmiſſion to the Powers in being. Notwithſtanding this, ambitious and deſigning men have found means to employ the Goſpel as an engine to diſturb at one time or other the peace of almoſt every ſtate in Europe.—The Uſurpation and Tyrannies of the Church of Rome, and its unbounded controll, for ſome ages, of all the Civil Powers of the Weſtern World, are an aſtoniſhing inſtance what the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity can effect in direct oppoſition to the Spirit of it.—The juſt and neceſſary attempts at a reform of all this, in the laſt age but one, gave occaſion likewiſe, it muſt be owned, notwithſtanding every precaution to prevent it, to ſome enormities of the kind. The French were early diſpoſed to have embraced the Reformation, and in all human probability would have done ſo; but that it made its firſt appearance among them in the unnatural ſhape of civil tumult. The conſequence was dreadfully fatal both to the firſt Patrons of it, and to the cauſe itſelf which they meant to promote.—The ſame ſpirit of intemperate zeal, and contempt of authority, attended the introduction of it into a neighbouring Kingdom; there, however, it prevailed, and was at length united with the ſtate itſelf.—In England the ſame buſineſs had greater advantages. It began in the right place, and was conducted with temper, and diſcretion and meekneſs.—It received the countenance and encouragement of the Civil Magiſtrate, but made no attempt to encroach on his Authority.—It acquired, by theſe means, a ſtrength and ſtability which kept thoſe men for a while quiet (and ſuch men there were

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from the very firſt among us) who regarded the Church of England with a more jealous eye than they did even Popery itſelf. Popery they ſaw was effectually defeated; but the Church of England was a main obſtacle to their projects.—The firſt glimpſe of any miſunderſtanding between the Prince and Parliament, whether originally excited by themſelves or not, was certainly an opportunity too favourable for their purpoſe not to be ſeized with eagerneſs. A known ſympathy of diſpoſition in their neighbouring Brethren, added to a prevailing jealouſy between the two Kingdoms, very greatly improved the conjuncture.—New heats were daily fomented to widen the breach between the King and his Parliaments. Seditious Preachers were employed in all quarters, and the people induſtriouſly taught by them, that the intolerant Rigours of their favourite Diſcipline were of the very eſſence of the Goſpel itſelf, and that God would aſſiſt them in the eſtabliſhment of it by whatever means. In the end, the very name of Chriſt was held forth as a ſignal for Rebellion. Conceſſions one after another were extorted from the peaceable and forgiving temper of the King, till at length the hand of civil government was ſo weakened, that the Laws and Liberties of the Nation had nothing left to protect them. The great fences once broke through, a total ſubverſion of all Order, Religion, and Government preſently followed; and the firſt movers of the whole miſchief were themſelves involved in the general Ruin.—A weighty Leſſon to ambitious men at how great a riſque it is even to the proſpects of their own ambition, that they venture, on any pretence whatever, to

unhinge the Laws and Subordination of a well-eſtabliſhed Polity: A weighty Leſſon too to the inferior Ranks, if they would but for a moment attend to it, that their moſt valuable privileges are never ſo much in danger, as when they are taught to take the protection of them into their own hands.—In the preſent days there is not much to be apprehended from pretences to zeal for Religion. Religion is itſelf, in great meaſure, out of Faſhion.—Its maſque can ſerve no farther purpoſe; and therefore ſeems to have been diſcarded.—A certain Philoſophy, indeed, (as like to true Philoſophy, as the Hypocriſy of the laſt age was to true Religion) hath ſucceeded in its place; which, inſtead of intoxicating the imagination, proceeds by flattering the Reaſon and ſoothing the deliberate pride of the human heart. From hence there hath of late ſprung up abundance of Theories, moral and political, equally ſubverſive of good manners and good government. From this ſchool every Mechanic becomes as expert in arguing on the natural equality of mankind, and the unalienable rights of individuals, as in the exerciſe of his proper craft. With ſuch principles, reſted on the authority of great names, (for in this ſcience the authority of names goes at leaſt as far as in any other) men ſoon acquire a competent conceit of their own political importance; they queſtion the propriety of Laws which it is both their intereſt and their duty to obey; and are no longer diſpoſed to attend to the modeſt dictates of a ſounder philoſophy, which recommends to them in terms they can underſtand, if they would, and on the higheſt of all authority, "TO STUDY TO BE QUIET,

" AND TO DO THEIR OWN BUSINESS [k]." Of ſuch Theories we can only ſay, that they are contrary to the Word of God, and have no foundation in the Truth of Things.

This being the caſe, by whatever talents they may be ſet forth and inculcated, there is every reaſon to believe it can only be with a view to miſchief and confuſion.

When we conſider to what enormity the Diſorders in the laſt century actually aroſe, it becomes matter of aſtoniſhment that they went no farther; that we have at this hour any liberty, any conſtitution, any Religion left. It ſhould ſeem as if God in his goodneſs had ſuffered the Wrath of Man to proceed the length it did, for our benefit, as well as in the end to his own Praiſe: to convince us, by a temporary interruption, of the ineſtimable value of thoſe Bleſſings, both in Church and State, which, under his Providence, had obtained in this country. One can hardly conceive it poſſible for an Engliſhman, at this time, to attend to what was then paſſing, for near twenty years together, without acknowledging the real excellence of that conſtitution under which he lives; without enjoying with a ſincere and religious gratitude, the comforts ariſing from it, as the ſpecial gift of Heaven. Thus even now doth the Wrath of Man, employed in thoſe dreadful warnings, turn to the Praiſe of God: and thus too appears the Wiſdom and Piety of our Legiſlature in calling our attention annually to this ſubject, that while we humbly contemplate

[k] 1 Theſſ. iv. 11.

and deprecate the paſt judgments of God, we may cheriſh in our hearts a more lively and thankful ſenſe of his preſent Mercies.

This diſaſtrous Story ſupplies likewiſe another Leſſon full of inſtruction. It ſets before us the moſt awful and moſt intereſting of all human objects, a great and good man beſet with calamities, yet maintaining his integrity under them, and a conſcience void of offence, both towards God and Man. Throughly ſenſible of his ſituation, and the unpromiſing turn affairs had taken, he ſaw plainly that his People's ſafety and happineſs were inſeparably connected with his own. What he felt, therefore, was more for them than for himſelf. To conciliate their affections, and reſtore that peace and tranquillity to them which themſelves had violated, was the chief and conſtant labour of his thoughts. In order to effect this, he gave way in ſome points too far; fondly hoping, that unreaſonable demands could admit of reaſonable ſatisfaction. An error that no good man would haſtily condemn him for; but rather collect from it a deciſive proof that he had no miſchievous deſign of oppreſſing and enſlaving the country. —He ſaw his miſtake himſelf when it was too late, and expreſſed his ſenſe of it in the moſt affecting language. "*I* "*could not*," he ſays, "*eaſily or ſuddenly ſuſpect ſuch in-* "*gratitude in men of honour, that the more I granted them,* "*the leſs I ſhould have and enjoy with them. I ſtill counted* "*myſelf undiminiſhed by my largeſt conceſſions, if by them I* "*might gain and confirm the Love of my People*[1]."

[1] Eik. Bas. § 5.

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From the firſt inſult he received, to the mock pageantry of his Execution, he never diſcovered the leaſt ſigns of terror or diſmay; ſupported under God's grace by a conſciouſneſs of his own upright intentions, and the genuine principles of Chriſtianity, which no man ever embraced on better grounds, or with more unimpeached ſincerity.—He was in the habit of reflecting attentively on every occurrence as it happened, ſetting down with care the reſult of his thoughts, referring all with meekneſs and reſignation ultimately to the hand of God. Whereby (as an eminent Writer obſerves, to whoſe word perhaps the preſent age may allow ſome weight) "*he ſaved the World the labour* "*of giving a juſt repreſentation of his behaviour in his* "*ſufferings, having left his own portraiture drawn by himſelf* "*in ſuch lively and laſting colours* [m]."—To ſuch a picture they who are concerned in high ſtation with the conduct of public affairs, when they are moſt preſſed with public calamities, may and ought to look with reſpect and veneration. The ſame anxious and diſintereſted attention to the duties of their great charge, the ſame integrity, the ſame unwearied recourſe to the principles of Chriſtian Faith and Practice, will furniſh them, in the end, whatever may be the iſſue of their troubles, with the ſame intrepidity and unſhaken conſtancy.

With a view of thoſe times before our eyes, the benefits derived to us purely from the government under which

[m] Burnet, Hiſt. of Ref. Vol. II. p. 51.

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we live, muſt appear, if rightly apprehended, much too important to be trifled with. Every eſtabliſhment that hath any thing of the hand of man in it, will partake, in a greater or leſs degree, of human frailty. Defects, therefore, there muſt be. It is no difficult matter, in order to ſerve a purpoſe, to magnify theſe defects, and ſtate them as of more conſequence than they really are; to fetch compariſons from other conſtitutions leſs exceptionable perhaps in thoſe particular inſtances, and argue from thence to the whole ſyſtem. No man would pretend to ſay, that the Government itſelf in this Country, or the Laws that defined it at the commencement of Charles the Firſt's Reign were, in every reſpect, a model of abſolute perfection: much leſs will it be ſaid, that the adminiſtration of that government was altogether unexceptionable. Human affairs are not to be ſo weighed. There were defects and errors in both. But the Government was, on the whole, ſuch as ſecured, or might have ſecured, abundance of peace, and comfort, and freedom to the whole kingdom. And whatever the miſtakes were, in the King's adminiſtration, they were ſuch as gave no colour to ſuſpect him of deſigns of diminiſhing the happineſs or juſt privileges of his people; nor called for the harſh remedies which were applied to them: They were intitled to a fair and candid interpretation; but, in fact, they met with nothing leſs; they were conſidered neither with candour, nor even common juſtice. A want of theſe virtues ſtrongly marked the times, and contributed much more than the defects complained of, to the miſchiefs

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and miſeries of them.—On the ſame ground, partial improvements may ſtill be pointed out, and plauſibly recommended; but are we ſure; have we even probable ſecurity that they will not damage the main Fabric? or is the promiſed advantage adequate to the riſque? The whims of ſpeculative, and the reſentments of ambitious and diſappointed men, are equally hazardous. Men uſually ſet a pretty high value on their own pretenſions: they are, therefore, eaſily perſuaded to think themſelves neglected; and lay the blame on their ſuperiors. Complaints are preſently transferred from men to things; from Miniſters to Government itſelf. A licentiouſneſs, in this reſpect, is among the moſt alarming evils of the preſent time. Men's minds are inflamed and exaſperated againſt each other by the baſeſt ſcurrilities. By this means all affection and reverence is almoſt utterly annihilated, not only to Governors, and thoſe in whoſe hands the diſtribution of the Laws is placed, but to the Laws themſelves. In ſuch a criſis we cannot be too careful how we attend to factious calumnies and ſuggeſtions, let them come from whom they will; much more how we aſſiſt in diſſeminating them ourſelves.—Every thing is at ſtake. But we are bound to this caution, not only by prudential motives, but, if we are Chriſtians, by every principle of duty.—Our religious, our ſocial, and our civil duties are inſeparable, and reſt ultimately on the ſame authority.—The ſelf-ſame authority which enjoins us "TO FEAR GOD AND LOVE "THE BROTHERHOOD," enjoins us alſo "TO HONOUR

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"THE KING[n]:" Our allegiance, therefore, cannot be diſpenſed with, but at the expence of our Religion and our Charity.—Every man has, indeed, a political importance, but of a very different kind from what, perhaps, he imagines. The State hath a near intereſt in the private conduct of his Life. Here a Reform is wanted: and it is in every man's power to begin it at home. If he would do it with effect, he muſt look firſt to his Religion. The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wiſdom, and of all virtue. If that be well impreſſed on our minds, we cannot fail to be wiſe unto ſalvation; good men, and good citizens, ſecuring, by the pure and peaceable deportment of our Lives, the Bleſſing of God on ourſelves and on our Country.—To a want of due regard to this firſt principle, is to be attributed all that depravity of manners, that ſhameleſs violation of every ſocial duty, and conſequent contempt of Laws and Authority which is too viſible among us.—Few are fooliſh enough, even in their heart, to ſay there is no God; but very many live as if they thought there were none. To this cauſe, ſo generally as it prevails, we are warranted in referring the calamities that have long threatened, and in ſome meaſure fallen upon us. Our final retribution is for another ſtate of things; but we know that God is a jealous God, and even in this world will vindicate his own honour.—The ſevereſt of his temporal judgments, the Wrath of Man, hath been let looſe upon us, the terror of War,

[n] 1 Pet. ii. 17.

in its moſt hideous form. In the end God will be praiſed one way or other—whether it be in our deſtruction, as an example to a ſinful world; or in his Mercy, by bringing us back, through his fatherly correction, to the Love and Fear of his holy name; to a ſenſe of duty to ourſelves and to each other; and to a peaceable and orderly ſubmiſſion to the Laws of the State, "NOT ONLY FOR "WRATH, BUT ALSO FOR CONSCIENCE SAKE [o]."—Whether this country ſhall ſtand a monument of God's favour and protection, or of his juſt indignation, it may yet reſt with ourſelves to determine. But there is no time to be loſt. God hath given us ſufficient warning that he will not bear with our iniquities much longer; "AND IT IS OF HIS MERCIES THAT WE ARE NOT "ALREADY CONSUMED [p]."——Let us, therefore, one and all, with hearty Repentance and true Faith, turn unto him; "HUMBLING OURSELVES UNDER HIS MIGHTY HAND, "THAT HE MAY EXALT US IN DUE TIME [q]."

[o] Rom. xiii. 5. [p] Lam. iii. 22. [q] 1 Pet. v. 6.

FINIS.